

ART. MUSIC.
AND
NATURE.

DAVID SWING.



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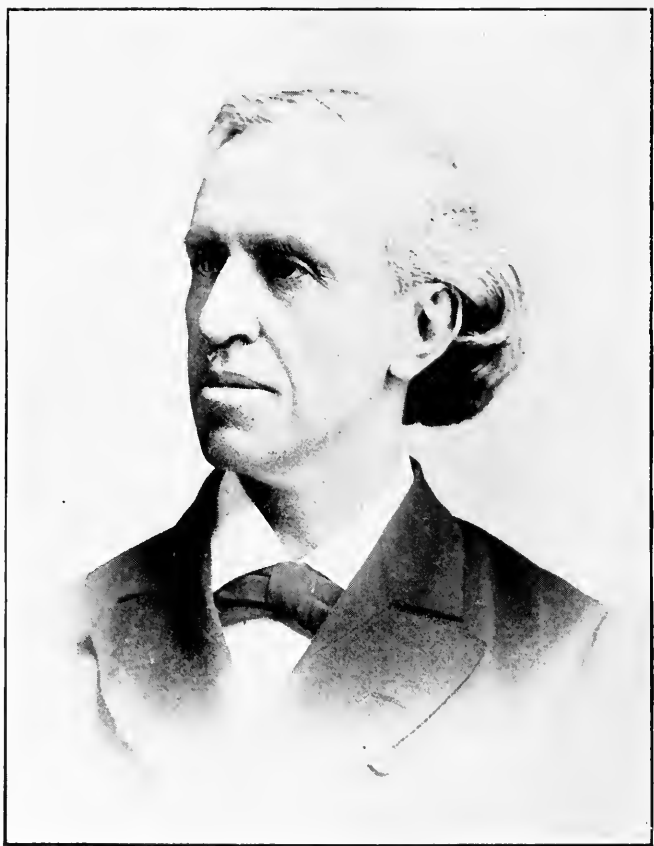
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1893

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.







DAVID SWING.

ART, MUSIC AND NATURE

SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS

— OF —

DAVID SWING

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of Life," Etc.*

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CHICAGO :
SEARLE & GORTON

1893

207279

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1893

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Art, Music and Nature.

Each art is a golden stairway by which man climbs up to see his world.

Art is an effort to express what the mind most admires in the world of form. The mind is full of images. When the eye is closed, the mind is full of scenes the most beautiful, and when the silence is perfect, then is the heart full of sounds the richest.

Art is an effort to coax the images out of the soul and make them material and lasting. Thus the canvas, the marbles, and the compositions of music are places where the mind sat for its picture.

The thoughts of some men take the form of words. The thoughts of other forms of genius take the form of canvas, or music, or marble, and leave us to wonder which was the greater, the talker or the painter, the Homer of a rich language, or the Beethoven and Mendelssohn who poured out their feelings in songs without words.

Art being an utterance of the mind, it stands related or indebted to religion for many a sacred and profound inspiration. Much of Wagner's music is sacred because no other department of thought offers themes as touching as those which come down from the depths of the sky. Wagner was a genius great enough to show what a power his sounds could extract from the land of immortality and virtue.

The soul feeds upon art until it becomes itself an artist. It need not produce creations for the public, but only for its own private market.

Men often weep when they hear pensive music, but this comes not because music uttered any words to them, but because it has made their own spirits become the creators of an eloquence all their own. The heart has become itself a forum, and its own Cicero, Pericles, or Massillon, is declaiming within.

What an artist is man when his own heart becomes for him an orator, able to turn the silence of a forest into eloquence, and the midnight stars into language.

All the arts are persuasive, not despotic. The woods in spring do not issue decrees for us to leave the begrimed city and appear in their presence. They silently invite. They grow eloquent without any rude language. For days and weeks their influence increases, until at last the

heart breaks every chain, and flies to accept an invitation that has no egotism, no office, no crown.

Man is as much a child of the beautiful as he is of wisdom or genius.

Nature never drives us if she can avoid it, she prefers to allure us. She makes all things charming. She paints the fields and the woods that we may go to them led by affection.

Nature makes the face of youth beautiful, throws a color on the cheek, and makes the lines of smiles and laughter come and go. She sends the soul into the eyes that young years may build up everlasting friendship.

Yielding to his divine Master's guidance, man follows the beautiful, and to the idea of home, or temple, or garden, or city he comes with both hands full of ornament. He claims for his house and his dress what God gives to the peach, or the leaf, or the rose.

In this deep philosophy, music comes as a decoration of a thought. Man submits his truths

to several steps of this ennobling work. He found them in prose, and he asks Milton, or Dante, or Tennyson, or Longfellow, to frame them into poetry ; but not satisfied yet, he takes the thought to the musician, and asks Mozart, or Weber, or Schubert, to pour still more color on the blessed truths.

It was not enough for the Greeks that some of their truth took the poetic form of the drama, it must also be sung on the stage, so that between the uplifted hands of both poetry and

music, all might see how sorrowful was Œdipus or how sweet Antigone.

Thus all through its history, music has been the final decoration of a sentiment.

Poetry has done much when it has gathered up some of the pensive meditations of man, and has called the rhythmical arrangement a poem. Even read to us, its flow of harmonious feet is impressive, but when Mozart goes farther, and wreathes those words with his composition, and calls it a requiem, then is the cup of our real-

ization full, and all the pomp and splendor of earth sink like the summer sun.

Music is the art that comes to Christianity with all its measureless power. If we could not answer atheism with argument, we could smother it with music. It is the ally of the pulpit; it is one of the forms of God's spirit. Inseparable friend of civilized man! Nearer to his soul than his libraries, or his sciences, or his commerce—for in infancy his mother lulls him to sleep with song, and, about to die, while body and

heart are failing, he requests that the nearest friends will sing some well known hymn ; and often the heart, bidding earth farewell, selects the music that shall burst forth over its own coffin-lid.

Thus are we lulled to sleep by music at the beginning and the ending of this world.

Music! Whence came this form of the beautiful, and whither does it tend? The evolutionists would assure us that the love of harmonious sounds

is a passion that has been created by a friction of atoms and energies, and by a natural selection, and by a survival of the fittest sounds that have been taking place for millions of years; but true as evolution is, in certain limits, the best descent that reason can find for this strange art is a descent from an all wise God. The Creator bound up the sentiment of music in the soul of man.

Evolution and selection may do much and explain much, but when upon a summer morning

we hear a robin sing upon the highest branch of a blossoming apple tree, and when a few hours after we hear the morning hymn coming out of the windows of a church among the trees, we must ask all the laws of progress to step back for the moment, and make room for God.

Music is one of God's gifts to his children for their culture and happiness. As God gave man reason and imagination, memory and love, so He gave man the power to enjoy certain forms

of sound—an inexplicable, ultimate sentiment in the soul.

Man is clothed, evidently, with certain divine attributes which the brute world does not possess. The brute will trample underfoot unseen, a flower which a child will run wildly to possess, and the delicate perfume which would not be detected by an animal is gathered up with gladness by man.

The beast of prey can scent afar the blood of its natural food, can even follow the old track

of its victim, but cannot perceive the best perfume of Arabia, nor the aroma of a sea-wind.

Man alone reveals a power to discern the beautiful. The universe around him is not only immense in its sizes and distances, but it is grand in its beauty. The star distances amaze the human heart. It grows silent and thoughtful when it learns that some suns are so far away that their light consumes six thousand years in coming to our planet.

The heart grows silent and meditative when it looks out upon the Atlantic or Pacific Sea.

When the flowers all burst forth in the spring, and when they are all fading in autumn, this strange soul marks within itself the spiritual flow and ebb of delight and regret, and when the thunder rolls, or the pine trees moan, or the birds sing, or the tones of voice or instrument send forth their vibrations, this human and mysterious power asserts itself and stands as happy and

blessed in the world of sounds as it was a moment ago in the world of color and perfume.

Of this sentiment of the beautiful, we can only say that it is an ultimate quality of man, one of the images of God in which he was fashioned when the Creator said, "Let us make man in our own image." Once set forth on its career it enters the schoolhouse like a child, and begins with its simple lessons.

Our earth repeats in all its departments the law of infancy and youth and middle life and mature age, with this difference, that arts and institutions do not grow old and die. All our arts pass through an alphabet, and the school-house, and the shop of the apprentice, but they do not, like man, fall into a grave.

Architecture at first was only an infant; it could build only a hut. So drawing and painting were once blundering apprentices; and music was in the outset of its history only a monotone

with the voice, and its second lesson was to rise to the accompaniment of a drum, or two strings tightly drawn. But the similitude between an art and an individual ends here, for when each one of us shall fall into our grave the arts we loved will pass on only improved by the lapse of years.

It should be an argument for immortality—the thought that a kind Creator will not separate the soul forever from these high pursuits and pleasures, but will in a second world waken man

to a new appreciation of the forms and sounds that gave such pure happiness here. Not only may the soul base its hope upon that kindness of God which will permit separated families and friends to meet hereafter, but also upon the benevolence which will call up the heart from its grave to resume again its experiences of the manifold beauty here seen only in outline. Many and great are the reasons for the belief that man dying here will waken to a higher life.

We need not pursue farther the inquiry,
Whence came the stream of sweet sound? It

began in that benevolence and wisdom of God which bestowed upon man the power to perceive and produce and love the beautiful; and having begun, the power has grown as the world has grown, and at last music ranks highest of the beautiful arts, unless we call literature an art. An art is to be estimated by its power, not only in any one person, but amid the multitude, and following such a method of judgment, painting, sculpture and architecture fall far behind this one form of sentiment—the sentiment of sounds.

A few may confess their partiality to painting or statuary; indeed, some are music-deaf as others

are color-blind; but looking at the human family, the delight and pathos of music is almost universal.

Music is the art which holds all in its spell. The fables about Orpheus, how, when he played upon his instrument, the very trees listened, and the wild beasts came to hear and laid aside their ferocity, are only efforts of literature to tell how powerful this form of the beautiful

has always been. Long before the modern penetration had said, "Let me make the songs of a nation, and I shall not care who makes its laws," Plato had said, "If you would know whether a state is well governed, you must look into the condition of its music."

Not only is this the fine art which reaches the largest number, but the art which touches the heart the most quickly and the most deeply.

Painting and sculpture and architecture are quiet forms of the beautiful compared with music. It is said to be the only one of the arts that can draw tears.

When the ancients wished to tell how powerful were lute and voice, they had to resort to fancy, that the colors of the pictures might be gorgeous enough to be truthful.

When Orpheus played upon his lyre, the heart of Pluto relented and Eurydice escaped, the wheel of Ixion stopped, the vultures ceased

to torment Tytyas, and the thirst of Tantalus was forgotten, and the goddess of death forgot to go to earth to call away the infant or the aged from sweet life.

What Ulysses and his companions found it most difficult to contend against was not the billows of the sea nor the breakers of Charybdis, but the song of the sirens.

Hesiod says that when these two sisters sang, the winds paused to catch the strain, and that

the sea made music because those sisters, when heartbroken, cast themselves into its waves. Of no other art does the imagination speak with such extravagance.

Our epoch casts out from its speech these forms of fable, but in its more quiet eloquence, the eulogy goes on without any abatement. Luther declared music to be the most magnificent present "God had given to mankind." Mirabeau said, "Let me die amid sounds of sweet music." Richter said, "Childhood comes back when we hear music," and then again in his sorrow he says reproachfully, "Away! Away! oh music, for

thou speakest to me of things which I shall never find in this world."

The mighty brain of Napoleon, whatever may be said about his heart, gave us this decision: "Of all the liberal arts, music has the greatest influence over the emotions, and is the art to which the lawmaker should give great attention." Addison said, "It is almost all we have of Heaven on earth." Thus, in this eulogy there is no intermission.

Be the speaker Egyptian, or Greek, or German, or Englishman, be he philosopher, or lover, or

statesman, or theologian,—all follow one strain with amazing unanimity. The love of light and flowers is not more universal.

Such is the art which long ago was made the favorite friend and child of Christianity, issuing out of that nation which brought from old Egypt a many-stringed harp, from that nation whose daughters could not sing their joyful songs in a strange land, but who hung their instruments upon willows and wept ; issuing from that nation

whose mission was religious, and whose temple echoed for centuries with a vast chorus, chanting psalms. Christianity dismissed the Mosaic rites and law, but detained the song. A Christ could supersede an artificial ceremony, but He could not displace a hymn—the one was Mosaic, the other was the eternal human.

In the Roman Catholic ages this divine music went forward. In all else opinion could change and dogmas were set up and torn down, but the

hymn and the instrument went forward when all else went backward or stood still.

The harp turned into a piano; the little instruments, blown by human breath, turned into the organ; and the bass voice of Luther ceased to be opposed, and was welcomed as a new element in harmony.

In no one century of the Christian era was the high art of music in its instrumental or vocal forms brought to a sudden perfection, but from the

very first morning when the shepherds heard music in the Bethlehem air, has this beautiful language of religion been enlarging its borders.

One might feel that the Italian and German genius of modern times had created this world of tune, did we not read in St. Jerome's writings in the fifth century that he had seen an organ whose music could be heard a thousand steps. Many similar allusions must lead to the conclusion that Italy and Germany have only given

immense impulse to a sentiment already deep and powerful.

Wherein lies the spiritual power of this concord of sweet sounds? Mark this, that the chief defect in the soul is its natural inability to realize the scene in which it lives out its days upon earth. The Indian cannot measure life or death, love or friendship, or honor or charity. All these nobler things lie far above him. Thus were we all once by nature. Man was blind and deaf

and dumb in the midst of a divine world. But by degrees he has risen upward in all his faculties, and at last he has come to some sense, though still inadequate, of the tremendous surroundings. All the mysteries of life and death have grown upon him. Childhood and old age have become thrilling spectacles. Once only dead facts, they have expanded until they lie out before us like the ocean.

These are only two specimens selected from an array of impressive ideas scattered over human

life. This want of realization being the first great weakness of man, all the fine arts have come as higher angels to pull him up out of the pit; and music appears as the exaltation of a truth until the dull eye shall see it, and the sleeping spirit feel its reality.

What influenced Angelo was not a statue alone, not painting alone, nor all these arts, for he was a poet, and in all ways an intellectual giant. The statue, rising up out of falling chips,

was to him an emblem of the soul rising amid the influences of the world's hammer.

Angelo wrote:

“The good is but evolved by Time's dread blows ;
The vile shall, day by day,
Fall like superfluous dust away.
Thus, take whatever bonds my spirit knows,
And reason, virtue, power, within me lay.”

A great awakening had dawned before Angelo came, and thus the age gave him more than

sculptor's art, gave him the power to see in his marble images the spiritual side of humanity. The picture, the statue, the columns and arches were only the external expressions of great truths and thoughts.

In the art of that period we can note that a great religion was surrounding all these workers, and that the culture of the classic age was forming a union with the higher religion that had come from Judea.

It would be a great loss to the heart if truth was limited to only the decorations of the four

great arts. Architecture can utter a few words only in the name of religion; the sculptor only a few; the painter only a few. Music can say more than any sister art; but, after all the musicians have used their many tones, much still remains unexpressed, and the mighty ideas of religion must look to still other forms of language.

The language of the three material arts is small when compared with that language the mind and heart can speak through words and actions.

What can architecture, sculpture, or painting do for our children, or say to them? Can these arts see them wake in the morning to find what the reindeer and sleigh may have brought them in the night?

Can the common arts laugh and play with the young? Can they rear an evergreen tree and make it bear rich gifts?

Can the sonatas or the orchestras build a Christmas fire? The artists and orators from Paul to Angelo left much unsaid. Man's religion is greater than all the old fine arts.

Modern art is drawing nearer its divine guide, and is making the beautiful join forces with the true.

Beauty, to all those who think the world came from a God, is only the dimly expressed wish of that God; and man is to find it and love it. Man is to carry it forward. He must not distort it, he must kindle into a flame the smoking flax, and bind up the broken reed.

Nature begins, man continues.

Art is not simply man's sense of the beautiful, it is also an expression of his wisdom, that thought which guards the education and happiness of the soul.

When we have listened to music or seen the great in art, we have not simply enjoyed the gratifications of the sense of happiness, but we have been upon a moral height where the air is purer than the common air, and where there are more distinct traces of a God.

Moses is said to have gone up into a mountain to receive the laws of the Almighty, and catch glimpses of a glory not visible in the vale. And then his human face, hardened by cares and storms, became brilliant as the halo of a saint.

Thus art is a withdrawal of man from the valley, and a leading of him up into a holier height where there is not simple beauty of form or sound, but where there is an elevation of mind and spirit which no other power can bring.

The beautiful becomes only a gate of pearl,
that opens to the good.

Art is not an embodiment of beauty alone,
but it is a path, which leads man up into the
mountain where the highest intellect communes
with the infinite goodness and greatness of God.

Each great work of any art is only a child
of wisdom justifying that bosom from which it
sprang.

Art is not a carving and a painting of all the objects living or dead upon earth, but a selection of those forms which carry within, all that ought to be immortal; so the field of each one must not be the mad chaos of human life in its vices and crimes and passions, on the ground that it takes all kinds of people to make a world, but rather the world of each must be detached from the realistic chaos, and be composed of goodness and beauty alone.

It takes all kinds of people to make a bad world; a good world is composed with the omis-

sion of many varieties of person. As a man filters muddy water before he drinks it, so must he filter the world for his spirit.

Nothing can lead the young up into nobleness but a relationship to a world greater than themselves.

Many are born with certain great impulses within, and these would not be total failures even though their lot were cast in some lonely island,

but these gifted ones, and much more all others, need to be drawn out and upward by external hands, because in any young bosom there are only the forces of a brief day upon earth, whereas the world contains the momentum of many thousands of years.

The average mind comes into life with a taste for music, and if left to itself it might hum a few notes or draw a string tightly and touch it with the finger; but when this mind falls into a world

of music, a world swept over by the waves from Mozart, Beethoven, and a grand army of such creators, these external hands lift up the incoming soul, and the girl of twenty plays harmonies it took earth many ages to produce.

The noblest man or woman will be that one who always sees the world in the highest light.

Our galleries are not to be full of the pictures of the African bushman and of cannibals slaying

and eating a captive, but art stands amid realities as an eclectic, and selects those facts which awaken emotions the noblest.

Ananias and Sapphira were as real as Christ and Mary, but art did not open to receive their faces as quickly as it opened to admit the Madonna and Jesus.

The true realism must be that which from an infinite collection of actualities, selects those

which become an inspiration of the mind and a pure pleasure of the soul.

That world which is the field for art is not each ugly square inch of the human past, present and future, but it is all of earth that can add to the power of the mind, and to the power and purity of the heart.

It must not be a matter of complaint that not all can be painters, or architects, or sculptors, or

poets. These names stand for only the most exterior and most marketable goods in the kingdom of beauty.

The man or woman who can do good deeds, the person whose character inspires, whose smile cheers, whose hand leads, whose presence blesses like a sunbeam, is an artist, because in this one, the theory of the human race steps forth in *life*, like the statue of Pygmalion.

Powerful as all the fine arts are, they have been dumb when compared with the words of friendship and praise with which man has cheered man along the world.

A soul surrounded by noble friendships is more blessed than a soul surrounded by the creations of genius. Henry Thoreau attempted to live alone. Philosophy was to be his friend, nature his beauty, the birds and winds were to supply him with music, and the clouds with dreams.

But in a few seasons an awful want sprang up. This want could not be met by any morning bird song, not by any blossoms of spring, not by any fruits of autumn, not by any sighing of the pines, nor by a colored sunset; the heart asked for the inspiration that comes from human life; and the poor hermit had to run back to where he could walk the path of existence hand in hand with humanity.

All the charms around the little cabin in the woods were real and great, but they were dumb

beauties compared with the many-sided eloquence of mankind.

Henry D. Thoreau did not want to go back to the world's furniture, its raiment, its luxury, its gold, but he wished to return to its refined and sympathetic soul. Its language was far above the language of the birds; its smile was better than the smile of the sea; its tears of joy or grief, more touching than the million dewdrops on the branch or vine.

If human life is like a fine art, it must be advancing with uniform and gentle stepping.

You cannot wait for the uprising of the religions of our race, you must live out your life now. To-day and to-morrow—and you are gone! Fill to the brim the urn of your own life. Your soul must express itself. Its love, its sympathy, its benevolence, its honors, must burst their shell and find in this short season a springtime for

blossoming. Man's works are his most visible destiny. To these he repairs with his deepest thought and noblest passion, and it is while he is busy at these, God meets him, and transfers to paradise the servant so faithful upon earth.

True beauty lies nearer to civilization and happiness than wealth lies. All hearts move to its music. The coming spring already charms; beyond that lies the summer; beyond the summer, the colored leaves of autumn.

According to Socrates, and all after him, from Victor Cousin and John Ruskin, all this pageantry of loveliness, from a rose to a madonna face, is only the picture of a moral excellence, and points to God and a divine Christ.

The heavens are a suggestion of a great Creator, while each lily contains the qualities of a Christ. Every note of good music leads the mind away from sound, far up to thought, to rich memory and precious hope.

Music and nature never end in themselves; they lead man up to a still greater height than their own.

The whole true beauty of earth is a flowing river which is to carry us all along toward a world and a life more beautiful still, where the imperfect passes up toward perfection, and the mortal is cast upward into immortality.

As Beethoven looked into music, pondered over it, slept near it, dreamed of it, until at last it ran on in beauty in his creative mind, even after he could no longer hear its notes, so all ideas grow in the heart, where, having been once welcomed, they are turned over in their many attractive lights.

The highest form of human life will always be found where the highest truths are stimulating the highest feelings.

Inspire us again! Cause man and God to pass before us in greatness. Lead us from the baptism of water to that of living fire. Make our hearts forever young, and our world forever new.

That music is dearest which carries man away from his poverty, his ignorance, his shop,

even his guilty conscience, and makes him a citizen of the universe.

Ethics is its own reward. Each good deed pays for itself instantly. As in music, the happiness comes with the tone, with the striking of the string, the hearer being at once in his heaven; so in morals a Christ-like deed is instantly a joy.

It need not fear hell, nor wait for heaven. It is the instantaneous music of the heart.

Wisdom's ways are those along which the form of God has just passed, the great roseate band on the horizon along which Dante saw passing in beautiful triumph, the chariot of our Lord.

The story that Mozart died while listening to the impressive requiem almost leads to the belief that a harpsichord contains the philosophy of a

happy life and a happy death; but the fact is omitted that much of Mozart's music drew its sweetness from the worship of God, and the requiem itself was a structure which reposed wholly upon the Christian's faith.

Instead of being an end, beauty acted only as a language for man's trust in his Creator. If Mozart helped the sanctuary, the sanctuary helped Mozart.

The church supplied the thoughts which genius expressed in melody. This is the art that comes to Christianity with all its measureless power.

“Music, oh how faint, how weak

Language seems before thy spell !

Why should feeling ever speak

When thou canst breathe her soul so well ?”

The true genius of the pencil, or the chisel, or of poetry, spends a part of life in loving study

of the out-door world; and then in some room with four walls and only a little light streaming in at some opening, all contrived and built by poverty, to be rented to a deeper poverty, combines and creates, and paints or carves, until there comes forth the ideal face, carrying the artist and the beholder far up toward the perfections of some better world. All he asked of the senses was that they should give him a help-

ing hand in early life, afterward he could create worlds for himself.

Man is essentially a mental being. He is not of earth nor for earth. All efforts to make him a creature of sense have resulted in his ruin.

Fasten him to earth and he becomes a glutton, or a drunkard, or an animal; but detach him, leave him to his thoughts, and he becomes a philosopher, or a poet, or a writer, or an orator, or some form of divinity.

What is abstract beauty here will become the reality of a second world ; and the place where the mind is freed from all humbler pursuits, and their penalties in tears, and sorrow, and death—that will be heaven.

THE END.







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